

Burke, Thomas F.

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# A TRILOGY ON PRAYER

by

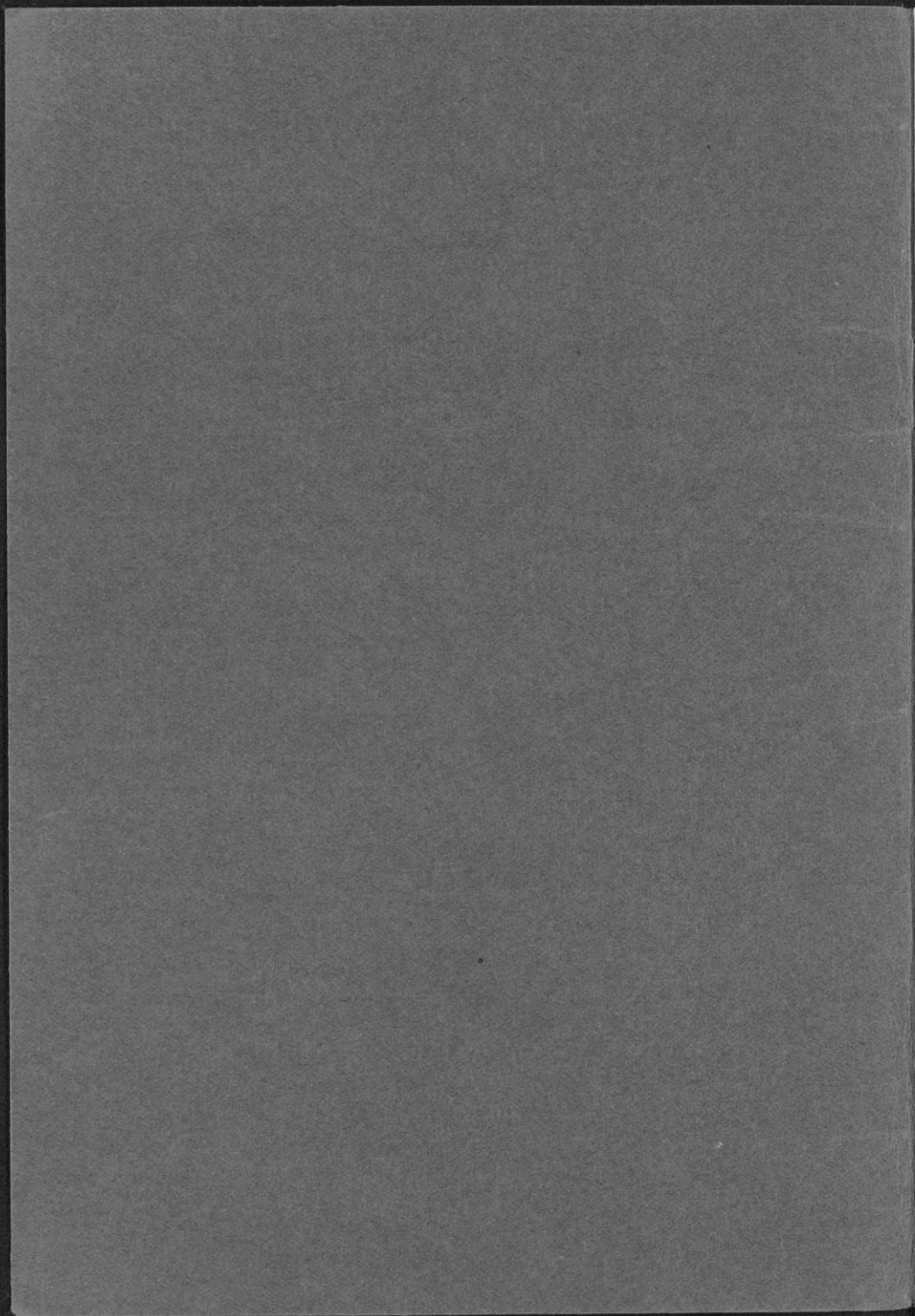
Rev. Thomas F. Burke, C. S. P.,  
Pastor of Old St. Mary's Church,  
San Francisco, California.

Three addresses delivered in the Catholic Hour,  
sponsored by the  
National Council of Catholic Men  
with the cooperation of the National  
Broadcasting Company and its Associated Stations.

- I. Divine Worship a Human Necessity.
- II. The Nature of Prayer.
- III. The Utility of Prayer.



National Council of Catholic Men,  
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1314 Massachusetts Avenue,  
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## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION.

"Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." This truth, so expressed by St. James, is the divine reason for the human reaction that is prayer. Prayer is the most natural act of an intelligent being. In everyday life it is to the soul what meat and drink are to the body. In times of great stress or temptation or illness it is the soul's first resort. Prayer is foreign to no hour and to no circumstance. In this way the Scriptural behest, "Pray always," can be understood.

The following addresses, given in the Catholic Hour through the National Broadcasting Company and its Associated Stations, are concerned with various aspects of this highest duty and privilege of man. According to the law of his being and, more clearly and positively, according to the law of God's revelation, man turns to God to honor and praise Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to beg of Him His graces.

The appeal of these talks that went out over the air and that are now committed to the printed page, is therefore to everyone who believes in the existence of a personal God. Evidences of their wide and ready acceptance, when broadcast, have not been lacking. It is to be hoped that, in the printed form, they will be welcomed by those who listened-in and also by others who, not having heard, may yet read.

To

FATHER ISAAC T. HECKER

First Superior General of the Paulist Fathers.

## Divine Worship a Human Necessity

(Address delivered by Rev. Thomas F. Burke, C. S. P., in the Catholic Hour, June 8, 1930)

In all the aspects of his life man is subject to the discipline of Law. We live, for instance, in the world of physical nature. We are a part of that world. Laws, many in number, only gradually discovered, emerge from this great complex reality, the physical universe. To run counter to these laws spells catastrophe. Nature has its revenge upon its opponents. Physical health, physical security for man, means man's conformity with the laws of the physical world. Again we live in domestic surroundings. The institution of the family has its system of laws. Home and the happiness that it connotes call for recognition of these laws and for obedience to these laws. The child, for example, that is withdrawn from or deprived of the family influence is by so much the sufferer and the loser. Still again we live in that world which is the larger family, the world of human society. The social character of man is self-evident. From his birth to his death, he is, in some measure at least, dependent upon others. Violation of the laws that govern the life of this worldwide companionship means the generation of the outcast and the wanderer upon the face of the earth. Above all and beyond all, we live in relationship with the Supreme Being, the Creator and Ruler of all things. To every one comes that experience of which St. Paul speaks when he refers to Him "in Whom we move and are and have our being." Knowledge of this relationship, embracing all other relationships, means its acknowledgement in the soul of man.



If we are God's Creatures, He is our Creator with all the rights which that word and office imply. If within us is the capability of attaining truth, He is infinitely all Truth. If we may achieve the stature of goodness, He is supremely all Goodness. If there resides in us the possibility of appreciating the beautiful, He is essentially the all Beautiful. In a word, the two poles of religion are God and man. Religion means a relationship between two intelligences, the uncreated and the created. On the one hand is God, all powerful, all good, all true, all beautiful, and therefore all sufficient in Himself. On the other hand is man, weak, dependent, with capabilities to be developed, looking to Heaven for support and consolation. Fully aware of the lofty dignity and the masterful powers of his own intelligent nature, man also recognizes that the highest act of that intelligence is its submission to Him for Whom all things have their being, at Whose word the heavens and the earth and all they contain have been called into existence. The acknowledgement of the submission is worship—the human worship of the Divine. Thus, within the sanctuary of his own soul and in the privacy of his own individuality, the most essential act of worship is achieved. It may not indeed be all that is demanded by man's humanity, but the silent, unexpressed adoration of God within the confines of the heart rises on invisible wings to Heaven's throne.

No matter how profound the external posture, how numerous the external gestures, how complex and illuminative the ceremonies, how rich and beautiful the auxiliaries, these will be only as a corpse unless they be animated by the soul of worship



which is spiritual and interior. The whited sepulcher is always an object of abhorrence. Whatever form man's worship of God may take, it must first and foremost be an interior intellectual reality—a faith by which the intellect acknowledges God as infinite truth, a hope by which the will seeks perfection in following the infinite goodness of God, a love by which the heart becomes fired with compelling affection for Him Who is the "Love of Loves." But is this interior worship enough? Or, rather, when we consider man in his complete nature, does it not appear that something besides the internal act is required? Man's very humanity demands more. When considering man we have to remember that we are dealing with a composite being. We are dealing with a being in whom there is not only a soul with its faculties of memory, will, and understanding, but also a body with its own reality and its own rights. This body, while subject to the dictates of the intelligence and will, is at the same time influenced by outward circumstances and external realities. Man actually gives expression in some outward way to the thoughts and convictions that arise within him. If he be pleased, he smiles, his eyes beam, his features glow. If he be insulted or offended, the flush of pain or the paleness of death covers the cheek. If he hate, the burning within cannot be restrained from bursting forth into flames. If he be recreant to his duty, he hangs his head in shame. Or again, man touches the canvas and it glows with the beauty of his internal idea: he chisels the marble and it lives with the inspiration of his genius: he vibrates the strings and they respond with the very music of his being. According to the very laws of his human-

ity, man's interior thoughts and aspirations and convictions find outward form, and they are the nobler and the more real for such manifestations. Why then should man's loftiest thought, his noblest aspiration, his most thorough conviction, the interior worship of God, be alone concealed from human eye, and hidden from outward view?

An example is not out of place. We all recognize the reality of the sentiment of patriotism. A regard for the fundamental principles of the nation, an intelligent recognition of the blessings which our country bestows, a feeling that each of us partakes of her very life, all of these form themselves into a feeling of love for the country of which we are a part—this is patriotism. It is essentially an interior sentiment. No matter what a man might do in an external way for the life and success of the nation, if in his heart there were no love of his country, we would not and could not call him patriotic. Words, deeds, any outward acts that ordinarily would be interpreted as evidences of patriotism would actually be devoid of life and soul. On the other hand, given the real sentiment of patriotism within the heart of man, it does require and it does demand expression if it is to be in any sense adequate. To use the right of suffrage, to express oneself in speech or in writing upon questions that affect the welfare of the nation, to come to the assistance of our country in time of need, and even to take part in the ceremonial acts of saluting the flag or singing the national anthem—all these are but the rightful and natural outward expressions of our interior love of country. The soul finds for itself a body. So, in the field of religion: man has ever ask-

ed himself the question which was asked by the prophet Micheas: "What shall I offer to the Lord that is worthy, wherewith shall I kneel before the high God?"

Cain in offering the fruits of the field; Abel in offering the firstlings of his flock; the Greek and the Roman slaying their fettered bullocks upon the altars of their false gods; the misguided barbarians casting their children into the flames, or throwing themselves beneath the crushing weight of the car which carried what they looked upon as their divinity, all give expressions, though sometimes distorted expressions, of their interior worship of God. To reject external worship of God is to deny the very humanity of man. For his humanity means that he is soul and body, spiritual and material. This assertion of his own completeness requires that his worship of God, a living, pulsating reality within him, externalize itself in response to his own essential need and to the story of Him Who created the world of matter as well as the world of spirit. As the sweet scent flows naturally from the rose, as the light of very necessity radiates from the sun, as an act of human kindness springs spontaneously from affection within the heart, so that reverence, that praise, that honor, that highest love which wells up as worship of God within man's soul cannot be restrained, but like the flood-waters must break from out its confines.

Another characteristic of man's humanity that affects the manner of divine worship is its solidarity. In the economic and sociological world, this concept is of recent realization, but none other of modern times has become so ingrained in world-wide

thought. In the religious world it is an idea at least as old as Christianity. It was voiced by Jesus Christ. Its consummation was prayed for by Him at the supreme moment of His life. It was reiterated in unmistakable language by His Apostle Paul. It has been preached by every teacher of Christianity. We cannot live entirely alone nor apart from others. We are always depending on others. We are social beings. We are bound not only to those in our immediate circle but to all the members of the human race. To the highest and the lowliest, to the richest and the poorest, the most learned and the most ignorant, to the happiest and the most wretched, to the best and the most sinful, we are bound in a unity that is not only racial but also social. All of which means that human society as such is the creation of God as well as is the individual being.

In the time of great crises, for the purpose of united expression no private voice is sufficient. The public must speak. Recently, for example, when the religious persecution in Russia became evident, in their need of protest men felt that no private expression could be strong enough. Throughout the land, therefore, great gatherings were organized. People of all faiths, of all political complexions, of all kinds of occupations, of all degrees of learning, came together to multiply, by public action, the private voice and to make the protest not only individual but social. Privately indeed the individual soul may render internal and external worship to God. In the quiet of his own room, in the solitude of forest or desert, in the wayside chapel or in great cathedral, alone, he may send up his worship in thought, in word, in attitude, in every way within his power

and his purpose. In that membership, however, which he has in the domestic society of the family circle, in the civic society of the nation, in the universal society of the whole human race, he must render worship in conjunction with others of his family, with others of his country, with others of his race. There is, in a word, need of common worship—worship of many united in one. For all these—family, country, universe—are dependent upon the God Whom we worship. Here is the reason for the builded church, for the temple of God, where men may assemble and together publicly pay tribute of adoration in the worship of the Maker of all things.

Internal and external, private and public, must the worship of God be—primarily indeed because God is over all things but also because of the very humanity of man. How this characteristic and all-embracing worship is gloriously realized in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass will no doubt be the subject of a future address in the course of the "Catholic Hour." Now we give the general principles. The worship of God is the first and the last instinct of the soul of man. Two pictures move the heart beyond almost all others: the picture of the little child at its mother's knee in answer to its mother's voice lisping the name of God in worship, and the picture of the aged dying man, with all the experience of a long life behind him, at the feet of his spiritual mother and in answer to her voice speaking the name of God in worship. In the beginning and in the end of life—but also in the years between—such is man's private duty.

In its highest concept man's life is the pursuit of

truth, of goodness, and of beauty. In the efforts of the philosopher or the theologian to characterize, inadequately though it be, the Supreme Being, he has called God all truth, all goodness, all beauty. Thus is God Himself the pursuit of man. When man worships, if we may divide the tribute that he pays, we may say that with his intellect he bows before All Truth, with his will he bows before All Goodness, but with his heart before All Beauty. He looks upon the majesty of the mountains and the tenderness of the valleys, the immensity of the sea and the gentleness of the little stream, upon the glory of the rising sun and the splendor of its setting; he studies the limitless universe of stars and planets or the tiniest flower that earth produces, but the eyes of his heart break through the beauty he beholds to the vision beyond. He cries out with the Psalmist:

“O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is thy name  
in the whole earth

For thy magnificence is elevated above the  
heavens.

For I will behold thy heaven, the work of thy fingers:  
the moon and the stars which thou has  
founded—

O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is thy name in  
all the earth.” (Ps. VIII).

Or, within the temple of God he gazes upon the tributes that man's handiwork has produced, upon the poem in stone that sings to the heavens, upon the paintings of the masters who have made the colors to live, upon the majestic altar with its Sacrifice the very heart of the temple: his ears listen to

the chanted song of praise, to the cry for mercy and forgiveness, to the canticle of joy and gladness—and the heart breaks through the beauty that he sees and hears, even the veiled beauty of the sacramental Christ, to the vision beyond. “How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.

“Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. They shall speak of the magnificence of the glory of thy holiness, and shall tell thy wondrous works.

“Before thee, I prostrate myself in worship, God, my God, the All-Beautiful.”

## The Nature of Prayer

(Address delivered by Rev. Thomas F. Burke, C. S. P., in the Catholic Hour, June 15, 1930)

The life of man, like man himself, is a combination of the spiritual and the material. Sometimes it would almost seem that material interests are allowed to preponderate. We behold the multitudes straining every nerve towards some goal, striving with all their strength to gain some end. But what is that goal, what is that end? At times it would appear to be earthly possessions, or sensual pleasure, or the power that wealth brings, or the ambition for fame; yet, I am sure that this would be a false interpretation of the activities of most of us, and would, if the veil could be drawn back, be found to be only a superficial estimate.

For, no matter how much we may be engrossed in the things of earth, moments come upon us when we realize that we are made for heaven. No matter how deep in the abyss of material struggle or of inevitable sorrow we may sink; no matter how fully we may be occupied with business or domestic cares, again and again a flash strikes across our spirit to tell us whether we are tending upon the right path or the wrong, and to reveal to us, with the accompaniment of supreme joy, the conviction that we are made for God. It is this elemental, basic, and universal truth that gives the reason and warrant for the act of divine worship which we call prayer.

There are, I suppose, some people in the world who deny altogether the existence of God. To these prayer is an impossibility. There are others who, while acknowledging the existence of God, nevertheless conceive of Him as standing aloof, in His



infinite greatness, from the world He created, and as devoid of any interest in men. To these also prayer is quite impossible. But to those who, like all Christians, believe in a personal God with a personal interest in the creatures of His hand, especially in His intelligent creatures, prayer is not only a sublime possibility and a reasonable duty, but also a marvelous privilege.

Granted all that we have seen thus far in these addresses during the Catholic Hour, the existence of a personal God with an essential interest in man, man's spiritual and immortal life, his immense and never-satisfied capabilities, his duty of worshipping the Creator because of the very fact that he himself is a creature; granted all these, prayer follows as a logical consequence. For what is prayer? Prayer is converse with God. It is that act by which man, conscious at once of his own weakness and yet of his immortality, mounts upon the wings of faith until he stands on that plane where he can see God and hear God and dwell in God's company. Its simplest and most general definition is formulated in the words: "Prayer is the uplifting of the mind to God."

First and foremost, therefore, prayer is an act of intellect. It is based on knowledge, man's knowledge of himself and man's knowledge of God. What is our most primary idea of God? It is that He is the cause of all things. The flower of the field, the sun in the heavens, the animal denizens of the forest, man with his spiritual faculties, the whole universe with its unmeasured immensity—all these things are from God. Man takes his place among them, caused by God, and yet different from all other creatures. They

know not but he does know the relationship existent between himself and his Creator. Knowledge carries with it urgency and responsibility. Knowledge of the beginning of man brings with it knowledge of the end of man. From God he comes, to God he goes. To the insistent question of every conscience of every man, in every place and in every age, "What shall I do?" comes the answer in the craving of the soul, because it is free and intelligent, for the God Who made it. That God is the Creator and that man is a creature is the basis for the legitimacy and the necessity of prayer. When, therefore, the mind of man reaches out to the everlasting hills of God, when it is lifted up to commune with God, when through such knowledge it makes acknowledgment of this relationship, then the man is said to pray, for "prayer is the uplifting of the mind to God."

Besides this general and all-embracing definition there is another that illuminates for us the character of prayer. The great philosopher and theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, gives this revealing description. He says, "prayer is the voice of desire." Again, according to this definition, prayer is an act of the intellect because it is based upon our knowledge of God. One of the ways in which we come to such knowledge is through a process of negation. In ourselves we are only too fully aware of our limitations, imperfections, faults, weaknesses beyond number. We predicate necessarily the absence of all such imperfections and limitations in God, because their presence in Him would be inconsistent with His supremacy of being. God and imperfection are incompatible terms.

Conscious of our own limitations we are at the

same time conscious that the law of progress is the rule of all life. We see it in nature, we see it in art, in the growth of the child, in the development of the man, in the triumphant conquests of the mind. What is true for other forms of life is equally true for the life of the soul: for that life which we are enabled to live in virtue of the supernatural gifts of God. Thus in Him Who is without imperfections we behold the inspiration to perfection. Thus we catch something of the meaning of the divine behest: "Be ye perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect." Our craving goes forth in the "voice of desire" that we may progress spiritually, that we may not go backwards, that we may grow in stature of soul, that we may come nearer to the ideal of man as it exists in the mind of God. That "voice of desire" is prayer.

Still another definition of prayer throws further light on its significance. This also is given to us by St. Thomas Aquinas, although it is also found in the writings of philosophers and theologians of all ages in Christianity, namely, "prayer is an asking God for our needs." Again let us say, even in this aspect, prayer is an act of the intellect because it is based on knowledge. In the progress of man's mind towards its possible understanding of God, the highest step is reached in the intellectual realization that God is absolutely, infinitely perfect. It is not enough for the human mind to deny in God the existence of any imperfection. It must further assert that God, in a positive sense, is altogether super-excellent. Every good quality is His in unlimited and infinite degree. Such knowledge of the Supreme Being brings out the truth that within His bounty is the

power of bestowal upon man of the things that man needs. So it is that prayer means the asking of God for our needs, with the firm conviction that if we so ask we shall receive, that if we so seek we shall find, that if we knock the gate of Heaven shall be opened to us. Prayer is thus our practical recognition of God as the Supreme Perfect One, the First Cause of our being with its limitations, of our redemption with its remedy for our imperfections, and of our eternal destiny with its means to gain the goal.

In its exercise of prayer the intellect plays its notable part, but the work of reason is called forth under the fervor of a will warmed by divine love. It is not too much therefore to say that prayer is the very breath of the soul. "Thou art my God," said the Psalmist, "because thou hast no need of my goods." Yes, but we have a need and a great need of God. That is why we pray, especially pray when we are most conscious of our needs. That is why, when trouble and illness and great trials oppress us, the soul naturally turns to God. That is why in our experience moments come when we are truly compelled to pray, when for the life of the soul we must pray just as for the life of the body we must eat. That is why so many fervent souls have thought it not a burden but a privilege to spend hour upon hour in prayer. That is why in the course of history the world witnesses the formation of many human souls that so transcend the average of mankind they seem to have become the inhabitants of a higher realm than that of earth. Communion with God brings us near to God.

In all this description of prayer it is apparent that the chief principle that calls forth from man

the recognition that prayer implies is the supreme greatness of God. Yet if we were to stop there the meaning and the purpose contained in the uplifting of the soul to God would be only imperfectly understood. Even in the early history of mankind and in our own estimate of the things that are human we distinguish between the sentiments that are aroused in us by the existence of power and greatness in the objects of our admiration and those other sentiments due to characteristics that call forth our devotion and love. Many figures have walked the stage of history who, because of their wonderful achievements in the material world or in the intellectual world, or in the scientific world, have called forth wonder and a certain amount of honor. Oftentimes, however, to such characters we have not been able to yield the high devotion of the heart because in them not infrequently we have found to be lacking that quality which more than any other compels not only admiration but also love, namely, goodness. For after all, when we analyze human feelings we find that the tribute of devotion is granted most sincerely and most fully to those who have been supremely good rather than to those who have achieved only greatness and power. In the long and graphic story of the heroes of time, the most glowing tributes, tributes of deepest devotion and of most loyal love, have been expressed for those personages that are rightly called the saints of God. No matter what may be the personal failings and the imperfect lives of the men who give thought to any of these things, such men necessarily yield the highest measure of their love to those who, like St. Francis of Assisi, like St. John the Evangelist, like St. Paul the Apostle, have

achieved the glorious triumph of virtue.

Accordingly we may rightly conclude, without any real separation or division of the supreme qualities that exist in God, that from the human point of view the one which leads the heart and moves the soul to the highest degree of devotion to God is His infinite goodness. Greatness, omnipotence, immensity, omniscience, the rule and government of all things—these indeed must necessarily call forth our worship, but it is God's supreme quality of goodness that calls forth love, and it is this which more than anything else necessitates upon the part of the human soul the practice of prayer. Thus we understand that while we describe prayer as an act of the intellect, it is equally an act of the human will and of the human heart. It is the goodness of God that establishes beyond all other things the meaning and significance of that kind of prayer which expresses itself in the sentiment and the act of adoration. We adore Him because He is supremely great, but we adore Him all the more because He is supremely good. It is this very quality that so extends itself and so relates itself to other phases of the spiritual life, that gives to us also the reason of the other divisions of prayer.

The realization that comes to us, after the recognition of God's goodness as the supreme reason for our adoration, is that this same goodness has been the source of all the things, natural and supernatural, that we have possessed and now possess; all the blessings that have attended us on our way; all the graces that have been received into the temple of our soul. As a consequence of this understanding there wells up within the human heart the sen-

timent of gratitude and our prayer goes forth in thanksgiving to Almighty God. In the history of the Church and in the solemn liturgy of her services, no sentiment is so often to the fore as that of thanksgiving. For the greatest act of sacrifice, and consequently greatest act of penance (which is the very life of the worship of the Church), one of the names most commonly employed is the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving. Our prayer ascends to Heaven not only as an act of adoration but also as an act of gratitude. With this understanding, the mind of man marches on and the goodness of God, which embraces in itself His interest in us, His concern for our salvation, His desire for our spiritual life, is seen to be also the source of divine mercy. Man, in the depths of his weakness and in the consciousness of his own personal faults, in his perception of the fact that the acts of his life have been, in large measure, violations of the law of God, man, even from the depths, cries out to God for the forgiveness of his sins. Thus our prayer, which is dependent for its answer upon the goodness of God, is not only one of adoration, not only one of thanksgiving, but also one that beseeches pardon.

Further still the mind of man goes. For it is not a far step from the understanding that all past gifts have been the result of God's goodness to the understanding that all our future gifts must come from the same source. Thus, aware of his failings in the past, and of the history of his soul's defeats, man strives to break through the veil of the future and, looking into the distance which is yet to be traversed, appeals again and again to Almighty God for the graces that he needs, for the spiritual helps that are required in order that his soul may

truly live. In other words, it is again the goodness of God that is the strong justification for man's prayer of petition: that kind of prayer by which he makes appeal to God for assistance. Worship, gratitude, contrition, appeal sent up to God—each and every one of these is prayer, and prayer is all of these.

The great truth that at one and the same time is the foundation of prayer and the fruition of prayer is that God is the Center and Heart of our life. As the various colors of the rainbow that come to our eye through a prism are centered in the one pure ray of sunlight, so the adoration that our soul yields, the feeling of gratitude for blessings that wells up in the heart, the cry for pardon that our conscious sinfulness and sorrow send forth, the petition for help in our future needs, are all centered in the thought of God, all great and all good. In the light of that realization, two figures stand resplendent and alone, God and my soul; my soul and God. I stand amid the busy throng of the world, amid the rush and activity and mundane interests of every day existence, but I am ever conscious of another world where dwell God and my soul, and the law of that world is prayer. I gaze at night into the sky above, resplendent with the myriads of stars and planets, but the consciousness is within me that one day I shall go beyond them all—to God. That which gives me strength in the face of the accountability that this destiny implies is my power of prayer. I look into my heart and see its capabilities not only of grief but of joy, not only of sin but of virtue, not only of defeat but of triumph, not only of hate but of love, not only of degradation but of glory, and that the everlasting



joy, the everlasting triumph, the everlasting love, the everlasting glory may be mine, I kneel in prayer to Him from Whom alone all these can come!

## Utility of Prayer

(Address delivered by Rev. Thomas F. Burke, C. S. P., in the Catholic Hour, June 22, 1930)

The chief object of prayer, as we have already seen in previous addresses, is the honor and worship that man renders to God. In this is to be found the highest utility of prayer. It is the vehicle of expression for man's first intellectual duty. But the utility of prayer does not cease there. Rather it is to be found in another essential, though secondary, object, namely, man's own spiritual improvement and advancement. In this connection we are concerned chiefly with that kind of prayer which we may call the most human, namely, the prayer of petition.

Naturally prayer is most intimately associated with the spiritual object of man's very life and of his every spiritual effort. The prime object of all the activities of the soul is union with God. The supreme law of life is the law of love; and the highest form of love is union. We see this in human relationships. Friendship, for instance, is an example. In what does that consist except in a union of souls? Thus it is we feel an injury done to a friend as if it were directed against ourselves. Thus we impart to a friend our secret joys and sorrows, our thoughts and plans and desires because we feel that these are his possessions as well as our own, since our souls are one. Indeed, through the existence of this most natural bond, which is at the same time spiritual, we can, in some measure at least, understand the supernatural and spiritual bond between the human soul and God. The same truth stands forth in that most fundamental and basic union between human beings in wedlock. Such a

union is to be deprecated and is most apt to disintegrate and dissolve when it is only physical or rests on only material interests. But when that union is one of souls as well as of bodies; when there is spiritual harmony; when the highest interests of life are the common property of two hearts that beat as one, of two souls that pray as one, then is wedlock truly an exemplification of the supreme law of life, love, and union.

Now, if it be given to us to penetrate in the least the mysteries of Heaven, it becomes apparent that such too is God's way of acting with man. That supreme union of love which exists in the Blessed Trinity, which, we might almost say, explains the inexplicable mystery, seeks to give expression in the world of intelligent creation. The revelations of God to man make known this supreme law of life and love which is union. The creation itself, in its highest interpretation, is the desire of God that other beings should share in His happiness and be united to Him in doing His will. The Incarnation, the coming of the Son of God made man, after man himself had broken the bond of unity, is a further expression of God's desire that man should be united with Him.

If we were to turn to man himself, man endowed with understanding and free-will, man conscious of his spiritual powers, man who rebelled against God and yet craved for God, we shall find going up from his heart the eternal cry: "My God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day, for Thee my Soul hath thirsted, oh, how many ways and in a desert land where there is no way and no water!" At his best man desires union with God; he desires the satisfaction of his being and for a being such as

man is, possessed of the spiritual faculties of intellect and will, such satisfaction can be found only in the union of the soul with God. It is the voice of all humanity that speaks in the words of St. Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are unrestful till they find rest in Thee."

How are this will of God and this desire of man satisfied? They are satisfied, first, by an action of God Himself. They are met by His giving to man something that is divine, something that by its supernatural character infuses into man an element that is over and above all human elements, and thus enables man to share in the very life and love of God. That gift which is the contribution of God to this sublimest union is called grace. Mysterious indeed it is, mysterious it will remain. Yet, just because we are spiritual as well as material, we can understand it to an extent. We have already seen that in human friendship the real bond is spiritual in nature, that is signifies above all things a union of souls. Grace we may rightly describe as the friendship of God bestowed upon man. It constitutes and establishes a union between the soul of man and the spirit of God. Or, we might call your attention to another illustration, one used by St. Thomas Aquinas. He tells us that if you take up a piece of iron, you find it cold, black. Surround it by fire. Gradually the iron becomes warm, then hot, finally all aglow, until at length you can truly say that it becomes a portion of the fire itself. So is it with the human soul. Cold for the want of love, black with sin, surround it by the grace of God: gradually it takes to itself the nature of that grace even as iron took to itself the nature of fire. That is what we mean when we speak of the union

of the soul with God. This is what St. Paul meant when he desired that that which is mortal might be swallowed up by immortality.

The giving of grace is God's part towards the accomplishment of this spiritual union. Upon the part of man, the action necessary for obtaining and maintaining such a union is prayer. Considering human interests, therefore, this is for man the greatest utility of prayer. It calls forth the grace of God, and it is the safeguard of the grace of God. For it is clear that prayer for union with God must necessarily be of two kinds: souls in sin must pray to be rid of sin and souls in grace must pray to avoid sin and to grow in grace. You will recall the answer of St. Joan of Arc. Her accusers, seeking to entrap her, asked: "Are you in the state of grace?" Her answer was: "If I am not I pray that God may put me there; and if I am I pray that God may keep me there." Such is the living sentiment of every sincere soul.

The act of prayer is chiefly a mental act. Prayer may indeed be vocal; it may express itself in words; in fact, it most frequently does so express itself. Nevertheless it may be purely mental and, even when it is vocal, it is chiefly mental. We distinguish between vocal and mental prayers but in doing so we do not mean to say that vocal prayer is not also mental. We cannot have words that mean anything without some thought behind them. The avoidance of evil and the pursuit of good is a duty in which the will of man figures most prominently, but the will is dependent on the mind for the knowledge upon which its decision is to be based. If men kept before them the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice; the purity of God and the evil

of any offense against Him; the understanding of the vast difference between good and evil, sin would be of rare occurrence.

The act of prayer, especially the habit of prayer, keeps constantly before us the One Whose commandments we are bound to obey and to Whom we offer dishonor by sin. Vividly before the imagination rises the Personality of God, not indeed outlined with exactness, but still most real to the understanding of the spirit. Ordinarily and commonly, amid the distractions and cares that beset our paths, the thought of God is allowed to become vague and indefinite, obscured in the shadows of time and earth. When, however, we kneel in prayer, when we think in prayer, when we seek in prayer, we are awakened to the reality of God. With the eyes of reason and of faith we see Him, we come near to Him, and in the presence of that reality we are enabled to appreciate justly the gravity of sin.

Amid the forces that tend to draw men from God the most insidious and the most powerful is pride. Pride is blinding. Pride is distorting. In its obscurity things seem what they are not. Not merely in this age, with its physical and material wonders, but in every age—for every age has had its wonders—we find many who have been filled with the sense of self-sufficiency. Mistaking effects for causes and discoveries for creations, men have lost sight of the ultimate truth and the ultimate reality that is God. Instead of realizing that the more man achieves and the more man discovers, the fuller and truer, though ever incomplete, should become his idea of God, he withdraws himself from the Deity and from all religion. It is the price of pride.

Were such men, on the contrary, given to prayer, which necessitates humility and lowliness and submission before Infinity, pride could have no place in their make-up. Rather, prayer, with all that it connotes in the way of reasonable belief, would hold the mind of such a one true to the appreciation of the infinite power and goodness and love of God. Prayer keeps us virtuous, and prayer keeps us reasonable.

Another consideration brings out the same truth. Conduct is indeed the most important thing to man's life, but conviction must precede doing and principle must precede action. A man is what his convictions are. When we say of any one that he is a man of principle we do not refer simply to the fact that he has principles, but rather we also mean that he lives these principles. Furthermore, it is a psychological truth that the more frequently he puts his principles into action the more perfectly and fully does he become expert in the application of his convictions to conduct. The geniuses in every phase of activity are those who have given the greatest amount of thought to the thing they would achieve.

The school of prayer is open to all comers. In that school have been trained and formed men and women of all degrees of worldly learning and of intellectual attainment. Strangely and strongly different in intellectual brilliancy as, for example, were St. Augustine and St. Teresa on the one hand, and the Cure d'Ars and St. Margaret Mary on the other, these souls progressed to the same sublime heights in the school of prayer. That school is open to all, even the most poorly equipped in a worldly sense, yea, even to the greatest sinner who,

when all other hopes have fled, may still turn to God in prayer. Thus is prayer the builder of character; the safeguard of virtue: man's act of cooperation with grace in the establishment and perfecting of the union of the soul with God. In the temple of prayer God and man meet. God gives this divine grace to man, and man gives himself to God in the submission of his intellect and will and heart. Radiating from this power and value of prayer are the consequent effects. Prayer becomes in itself a source of merit to man, as every good act performed in the grace of God is a source of merit. It adds to the sum total of divine approbation that shines upon every human action done for the love of God.

Prayer too has in it the effective power of obtaining that which it asks, the power, as it is called in the language of the Schools, of *inspiration*. All prayer that ascends to heaven, accompanied by the essential conditions of validity, draws from the spring of divine promise the waters of fulfillment. Not the least of the effects of prayer is that of satisfaction. The consciousness of sin to be atoned for, even sin that has been forgiven by infinite mercy, creates in man a desire for penitential expression of his soul and among the acts which he employs for that purpose is the act of prayer. Last, but no less important than the others, is the effect of prayer that we call pleasure or spiritual joy. Here enters the proof of experience. Here is the secret of the saints. Here is heaven on earth; eternity in time. For, if there stands out one fact above all others in the lives of those who have gained the heights of prayer, who have dwelt in the pure air of contemplation, who have lived in continuous



union with God, it is the unmeasured and unreasonable joy they have experienced. Nor need we search for that experience only among those whose names have been exalted by being placed upon God's roll of honor by the Church. Today, as in the past, there are countless souls, unknown to the world in general, with some we now and then come into contact, whose lives are often led in the lowliest walks, and who radiate peace and gladness and love that tell of a spiritual and divine joy in their hearts. He that has known that joy cannot describe it. He that has not known it cannot imagine it. The joy of the poet in the first flight of his genius; the joy of the bridegroom leading his bride; the joy of the mother bringing forth her child to be the child of God; the joy of genius in the conquest of victory—all these fade before the supreme joy of the soul rapt up by prayer into the love of God. Give to the bard transcendent powers of expression and he cannot adequately tell of it; give to the musician unequalled delicacy of touch and he cannot rightly sing of it; give to the orator sublimest power and language and he cannot describe it. There it lives, in the heart of man, pulsating with every heart-beat, the gift of God to man, the gift of man to God. Were there no other proof of the value of prayer this one of the supreme joy of those who have experienced union with God would be more than enough to cause men to raise their hands and exclaim: "Where these things are, there is God's true tabernacle with men."

In bringing to a close this short series of talks on the necessity of worship and prayer, I would voice one thought which I think may be necessary for at least comparative completeness. It is the hope I cherish that what we have treated more or less ab-

stractly may have for all a practical significance and a practical value. Thomas a Kempis, the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, writes: "I had rather feel compunction than know how to define it." So do I say: I had rather you practiced prayer than that you knew the definition of prayer. And yet, who will not say that it is best both to know and to do; to have the knowledge of the definition and also to put that knowledge into effect by action? The truth which the saintly author of the *Imitation* emphasizes and which I presume to emphasize, is that knowledge without effective use of that knowledge is worth little; that understanding of what prayer is amounts to naught of value to the soul unless that understanding find expression in act. The lives of intelligent beings with belief in God, in immortality, in the relationship between the soul of man and the spirit of God, must be lives of prayer.

It has been a joy for me to give. I hope it has been a joy for you to receive. But the greatest joy that I could wish you all is the joy of prayer, that joy which surpasses anything that the world can give. It will be your strength in time of trouble; it will be your peace in time of doubt; it will be your just balance in time of earthly rejoicing; it will be your stay in time of temptation; it will be your inspiration in time of decision; it will be your realization always of the perfect spirit that is contained in the prayer of prayers given to us by our Blessed Lord Himself: "Our Father Who art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen."



